

A COVER ASSEMBLY FOR HOSPITAL CARTS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTIONClaim of Priority

The present application is based on and a claim to priority is made under 35 U.S.C. Section 119(e) to provisional patent application currently pending in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office having Serial No. 60/237,493 and a filing date of October 4, 2000.

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a protective cover assembly primarily designed to enclosed a mobile delivery cart of the type used for the distribution of a variety of items, at least some of which should be maintained in an at least partially sterile environment, such as items used in hospitals or like medical facilities. The cover assembly includes an enclosure formed of flexible, preferably hyper-allergenic material which, when expanded into an operative position, substantially surrounds and encloses the cart as well as its contents, thereby facilitating the maintenance of the preferred sterile environment.

1 Description of the Related Art

2 Manually powered or propelled carts, hand trucks, bins, and
3 the like are widely known and used in a variety of both
4 commercial and domestic applications and typically involve the
5 temporary storage and transport of a variety of items from one
6 location to another in the same physical facility. Carts of the
7 type referred to may take a variety of structural designs and
8 configurations depending upon their intended use and/or the
9 items which they are intended to contain. Such structural
10 variations include carts designed to carry open top bins that
11 are primarily designed to contain a plurality of loosely stored
12 items. Examples may include grocery carts and carts used in
13 hotels that carry a number of bins holding soap bars, containers
14 of shampoo, etc. More structurally complex carts exist,
15 however, which include a plurality of shelves, open or closed
16 compartments and/or segregated areas, and are therefore,
17 designed to contain a plurality of products or items of the same
18 kind or class, in at least a minimally segregated manner. The
19 size of such carts, bins, hand trucks, etc. can also vary from
20 relatively small push carts, of the type found in grocery stores
21 and like retail establishments, to much larger carts, which
22 often times approximate the size of the person propelling the
23 cart and which are primarily used in industrial or other
24 commercial environments.

25 One area in which mobile delivery carts are used

1 extensively is in the medical field, wherein such carts are used
2 to deliver a large variety of items throughout hospitals or
3 other medical and patient care facilities. Such items include,
4 but are not limited to, surgical gowns, scrub apparel, sheets
5 and pillow cases as well as like bedding materials, surgical
6 masks, shoe covers, hair covers, and any of a large variety of
7 other medical products or devices necessary for proper patient
8 care. In the hospital setting especially, it is important that
9 at least some of these products be sterile and totally free of
10 germs. Thus, certain ones of these products are pre-packaged in
11 a hermetically sealed or otherwise sterile wrapping. Still
12 others of these products, however, are not pre-packaged, but
13 should still be maintained in a substantially sterile
14 environment. Preferably, a substantially sterile environment
15 should also be maintained for all of these items as they are
16 transported from a supply station to their respective
17 destinations within a hospital or similar patient care facility.
18 During the distribution and/or delivery process, items of the
19 type set forth above are typically stored on mobile delivery
20 carts as they are transported along a predetermined delivery
21 route within and distributed throughout the physical facilities
22 of the hospital or like institution.

23 During the time it takes to deliver the variety of items or
24 products contained on such delivery carts, it is desirable to
25 maintain, at least as much as practical, a substantially sterile

environment for the storage of such items as they travel along the aforementioned delivery route. This is particularly true in hospitals and the like where some germs, bacteria and infectious diseases may be carried in and transmitted by contact with the air. In that delivery carts of the type used in hospitals normally are "open", to the extent that one or more sides of the cart comprise a plurality of openings to facilitate ready access to the products being delivered, there is a recognized need for some type of cover dimensioned and configured to somewhat protect the delivery cart as well as the contents therein. It would be beneficial if a cover were developed that could effectively isolate the contents of the cart and, as much as possible, to maintain a substantially sterile environment on the interior thereof, regardless of whether the contents of the cart are pre-packaged or not. In addition, it would be highly beneficial if a cover were developed that were adequately structured or reinforced to the extent of significantly reducing the possibility that such a cover will be torn or ruptured which is quite possible as deliveries are made, and which would, thereby compromise the sterile environment under the cover, i.e., the interior portions of the cart and its contents. It would also be highly beneficial if a cover of the type referred to above were developed that could further aid in the maintenance of a substantially sterile environment by being formed of a flexible, strong, hyper-allergenic material which,

1 in addition, is capable of being selectively oriented in either
2 a collapsed, stored position or an extended, operative position
3 wherein the operative position includes a hollow interior
4 dimensioned to substantially cover the top and exposed sides or
5 faces of the cart. Of course, any such cover should enable a
6 person to easily access the contents of the cart, albeit in
7 somewhat of a restricted manner, so as to reduce exposure of the
8 interior portions of the cart under the cover, as well as its
9 contents to the surrounding environment.

10
11 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

12 The present invention is intended to address these and
13 other needs which remain in the art, and is directed towards a
14 cover assembly of the type designed to overlies and substantially
15 enclose a delivery cart or like structure, such that the cart
16 and the contents thereof are enclosed and protected. The cover
17 assembly of the present invention is made from a flexible, yet
18 relatively strong and substantially protective material and in
19 one embodiment, to be described in greater detail hereinafter,
20 is made from a hyper-allergenic material so as to maintain an at
21 least partially sterile environment on the interior of the
22 enclosure in which the cart is positioned. The hyper-allergenic
23 material from which the enclosure of the cart assembly of the
24 present invention is formed may be of the type commercially
25 available under the trademark STAPH-CHEK,TM registered in the

1 U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, namely, Reg. No. 802,786, and
2 manufactured by Herculite Products, Inc., a corporation of New
3 York with offices in New York City and possibly in Newark, New
4 Jersey, as well. Naturally, equivalent hyper-allergenic
5 materials can be utilized and are applicable for forming the
6 enclosure of the subject cover assembly, particularly when the
7 delivery cart of the type referred to is used in hospitals or
8 like medical facilities for the delivery of a plurality of
9 different products or items, at least some of which are intended
10 to be maintained in an at least partially sterile environment.
11 However, it is emphasized that the cover assembly of the present
12 invention does not have to be formed of a hyper-allergenic
13 material, as such an embodiment would still be considered to
14 fall within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

15 As set forth above, in hospitals or other patient care
16 facilities, a variety of items including but not limited to,
17 patient gowns, patient bedding, surgical gowns and other scrub
18 apparel including hair covers, surgical masks, shoe covers, etc.
19 are all maintained in a sterile condition until such items are
20 delivered to their point of use, un-packaged and applied as
21 intended. This is particularly true with surgical gowns or
22 like surgical and scrub apparel used in operating rooms,
23 intensive care units, isolation wards, etc. The present
24 invention facilitates the maintenance of these and other such
25 medical items or products in an at least partially or

1 substantially sterile environment during their delivery, by
2 providing a cover assembly comprising an enclosure, which is
3 dimensioned and configured to substantially surround and enclose
4 the delivery cart when the enclosure is in its expanded,
5 operative position.

6 More specifically, the enclosure comprises a top disposed
7 in overlying relation to an upper portion of the cart and a
8 sidewall structure secured to the top and depending downwardly
9 therefrom into overlying, covering relation to the various sides
10 of the cart and in substantially surrounding relation thereto.

11 The sidewall structure includes at least one access opening
12 that is structured and disposed to substantially correspond in
13 dimension and configuration to one side of the cart and/or to an
14 area of the cart so as to provide access to the contents
15 thereof. The cover assembly additionally comprises in the
16 preferred embodiment, a closure structure that is structured for
17 selective positioning between an open position and a closed
18 position relative to the access opening, in order that the cart
19 may be almost entirely covered on the interior of the enclosure,
20 thereby facilitating the maintenance of the aforementioned,
21 desired sterile environment. The closure structure preferably
22 comprises a drape of flexible material connected to the sidewall
23 structure and, in one embodiment, secured to extend downwardly
24 from either the top of the enclosure or an upper portion of the
25 sidewall structure in overlying, covering relation to the access

1 opening and to the area of the cart which is designed to provide
2 access to the contents thereof. The access opening is
3 preferably dimensioned to provide access to all of the various
4 items or contents of the cart by selectively positioning the
5 closure structure in the open position. Also, as the closure
6 structure is preferably formed from a flexible material, the
7 closure structure can be selectively positioned in a partially
8 open position which allows exposure of only certain portions of
9 the cart and access sufficient to only one of the contents of
10 the cart, as required.

11 The cover assembly of the present invention preferably
12 includes a reinforcement assembly. More specifically, the
13 reinforcement assembly comprises a plurality of reinforced
14 portions mounted on various portions of the enclosure. The
15 reinforced portions are disposed in spaced apart, strategically
16 located positions on the enclosure so as to provide protection
17 against physical damage, including tearing or rupture, such as
18 when the enclosure inadvertently engages wall surfaces, doors,
19 or the like. The various reinforced portions are also disposed
20 on the enclosure to prevent similar damage when the enclosure is
21 being manipulated during mounting on the cart and/or when the
22 closure structure is being moved to provide access to the
23 interior of the cart. The reinforced portions may be generally
24 defined as thickened material portions, ideally comprising
25 multi-layered structures of material, which provide resistance

1 to physical damage to the enclosure, as set forth above. Such
2 reinforced portions may include, but are not limited to,
3 surrounding peripheral seams located at the junction of the top
4 and sidewall structure of the enclosure, as well as a plurality
5 of corner pads strategically located so as to reinforce certain
6 areas of the enclosure of the cover assembly which undergo
7 stress or unusual forces when the enclosure is positioned in its
8 operative position.

9 The cover assembly of the present invention preferably also
10 comprises a storage assembly, including one or more pockets,
11 located at predetermined positions, ideally located both on the
12 exterior and interior of the cart and which are specifically
13 structured for the containment of various items. More
14 specifically, the storage assembly of the present invention
15 includes at least a first pocket or compartment disposed within
16 the hollow interior of the enclosure in a location which is
17 readily accessible. This first pocket or compartment is also
18 preferably formed of a hyper-allergenic material, as discussed
19 above, and is dimensioned and configured to removably contain
20 predetermined items or specific contents, which are best
21 maintained in as sterile an environment as possible, during the
22 delivery procedure. Accordingly, this first pocket or
23 compartment serves to isolate its contents from the cart, also
24 disposed on the interior of the enclosure, and from the exterior
25 of the enclosure until it is delivered to its intended

1 destination. The storage assembly may also include one or more
2 additional pockets or compartments mounted on the exterior
3 surface of the sidewall structure which are specifically
4 structured to removably contain a variety of other products,
5 items or contents, as desired.

6 These and other features and advantages of the present
7 invention will become more clear when the drawings, as well as
8 the detailed description are taken into consideration.

9
10
11 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

12 For a fuller understanding of the nature of the present
13 invention, reference should be had to the following detailed
14 description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings
15 in which:

16 Figure 1 is a perspective view of a cover assembly
17 according to the present invention disposed in overlying,
18 covering relation to a mobile delivery cart or like structure.

19 Figure 2 is a detailed view in partial cut away of one
20 portion of the embodiment of Figure 1.

21 Figure 3 is a detailed view in partial cut away of another
22 portion of the structure of the embodiment of Figure 1.

23 Figure 4 is a sectional view taken along line 4-4 of Figure
24 3.

25 Figure 5 is a perspective view in cut away showing interior

1 portions of a preferred cover assembly according to the present
2 invention.

3 Figure 6 is a sectional view of along line 6-6 of Figure 3.

4 Figure 7 is a sectional view along line 7-7 of Figure 2.

5 Like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the
6 several views of the drawings.

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8 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

9 As shown in the accompanying drawings, the present
10 invention relates to a cover assembly such as that generally
11 indicated as 10 in Figure 1. The cover assembly 10 includes an
12 enclosure generally indicated as 12 comprising a sidewall 14
13 disposed in substantially surrounding relation so as to form a
14 hollow interior of the enclosure 12. Further, the enclosure 12
15 includes a top 16 secured to the sidewall 14 such that the
16 sidewall 14 extends in a downwardly depending relation to the
17 top 16. The sidewall 14 may include a plurality of individual
18 panels or sides or alternatively, may include a continuous
19 structure of sufficient dimension to overly and cover
20 substantially the entire outer portion or plurality of sides of
21 a mobile cart generally indicated as 20.

22 The enclosure 12 is preferably formed from a flexible and
23 yet high strength protective material, which is ideally also
24 waterproof, that is capable of being selectively disposed in
25 either a collapsed, substantially folded position (not shown) or

1 an outwardly expanded, operative position as shown in Figure 1.
2 When in the operative position of Figure 1, the enclosure 12
3 includes a hollow interior that is preferably dimensioned and
4 configured to receive and entirely enclose the mobile cart 20.
5 In order to facilitate movement or travel of the cart 20, the
6 bottom of the enclosure 12, more specifically defined by the
7 bottom peripheral edge of the sidewall 14, remains open as at
8 18, so as to allow the wheel or castor assembly 22 secured to a
9 base 20 of the cart to pass therethrough into movable supported
10 engagement with the floor or like surface over which the cart
11 travels.

12 The enclosure 12 of the cover assembly 10 further includes
13 at least one access opening 26 formed in the sidewall 14 and
14 disposed in overlying, accessible relation to the hollow
15 interior of the enclosure 12. Preferably, the cover assembly
16 includes only one access opening disposed in corresponding
17 alignment with at least one side of the cart 20. More
18 specifically, the access opening 26 is ideally dimensioned and
19 configured to be substantially equivalent or at least to
20 correspond to the dimension and configuration of one side of the
21 cart 20, as shown in Figure 1, which facilitates access to
22 various portions of the cart 20, such as compartments or shelves
23 21, 23, 25 etc., as well as the contents therein. It should be
24 noted that the size and overall configuration of the access
25 opening 26 may vary dependent on the size and configuration of

1 the cart 20, and more particularly, on the arrangement or
2 disposition of the various compartments 21, 23, 25, etc. and/or
3 other facilities included on the cart 20 and utilized to store
4 and transport the various items or contents thereof.

5 As set forth above, one feature of the present invention is
6 the at least partial isolation of the hollow interior of the
7 enclosure 12 in order maintain a substantially sterile
8 environment therein for the various items or contents separately
9 stored on cart 20 as they are being delivered. Therefore, the
10 cover assembly 10 of the present invention includes a closure
11 structure, generally indicated as 30, preferably in the form of
12 a flexible material drape 32, which may have a variety of
13 configurations but which is specifically dimensioned and
14 configured to be selectively disposed in covering relation to
15 the access opening 26. Preferably, the drape 32 is secured by
16 a connecting seam or junction 34 to the top 16 or to the
17 sidewall 14 and hangs downwardly therefrom into removably
18 covering relation to the access opening 26. In addition, due at
19 least in part to the flexible material from which the drape 32
20 is formed, it may be easily positioned between a completely
21 closed position, defined by an overlying relation to an exposed
22 face or portion of the cart 20, or a partially open positioned
23 as depicted in Figure 1. Therefore, an advantage of utilizing
24 a drape 32 as the closure structure is that only a portion of
25 the hollow interior within the enclosure 12 may be exposed for

1 removal or insertion of various items or contents from or into
2 the cart 20, as required. It is, of course, to be noted that
3 the drape 32 may be selectively positioned into an entirely open
4 position in order to expose the entire, correspondingly
5 positioned face or side of the cart 20, such as when the cart is
6 being initially loaded for delivery or distribution of a
7 plurality of different items.

8 In order to maintain the closure structure, such as drape
9 32, in a closed overlying position relative to the
10 correspondingly disposed face or side of the cart 20, the cover
11 assembly 10 preferably also comprises a connecting means. As
12 shown in Figure 2 the connecting means can include a plurality
13 of spaced apart connectors 34 and 34' respectively secured to
14 and along a peripheral edge of the sidewall 14 in immediately
15 adjacent or contiguous relation to the periphery of the access
16 opening 26, as well as on a correspondingly positioned
17 peripheral edge or portion on the interior surface 32' of the
18 drape 32. Such cooperative connector portions 34 and 34' may
19 assume a variety of different structures including, but not
20 limited to, hook and loop type fasteners, (i.e. Velcro™) snaps,
21 zippers, etc.

22 The closure assembly 10 of the present invention preferably
23 also comprises a reinforcing assembly, which may be, but does
24 not have to be, mounted both on the exterior and interior
25 surfaces of the enclosure 12. The purpose of the reinforcing

1 assembly is to provide protection against physical damage to
2 various parts of the enclosure 12; such as when it inadvertently
3 engages a wall, door, becomes entangled with another object,
4 surface, etc. as the cart and closure assembly 10 travel along
5 the intended delivery or distribution route. The reinforcing
6 assembly includes a plurality of reinforced portions such as,
7 but not limited to, corner pads 40 formed on the top 16. The
8 corner pads 40 serve to protect the enclosure against stress or
9 forces exerted on the cover assembly 10 in a downward direction
10 as the top 16 is disposed in overlying, covering and at least
11 partially engaging relation to an upper portion of the cart 20.
12 For example, the corner pads 40 may be positioned on the top 16
13 so as to overly the corners of a support frame of the cart,
14 which serve to support the enclosure 12 in the intended
15 overlying, surrounding relation to the cart. The reinforcement
16 assembly may comprise alternatively of in addition, a plurality
17 of reinforced portions 42 disposed at each of the corners of the
18 enclosures such as at the lower end of the drape 32 so as to
19 provide reinforcing protection as well as serve as additional
20 "weights", due to their structure. The additional weight
21 facilitates the downwardly depending orientation of the
22 preferred drape 32 in its intended position over the
23 corresponding face of the cart 20 and into its closed position
24 in covering relation to the access opening 26. As shown in
25 Figure 2, the reinforced portions 42 are preferably mounted on

1 the interior surface 32' of the drape 32 adjacent certain ones
2 of the connector components 34'. The provision of the
3 reinforced portions 42 further serve to add protection against
4 the pulling force exerted on the drape as it is disconnected
5 from correspondingly positioned connector members or components
6 34 mounted on the exterior of the sidewall 14, as shown in
7 Figure 1 and discussed above. Correspondingly positioned
8 reinforced portions 44 may also be mounted on the interior or
9 exterior surface at the lower end of the exposed face of the
10 sidewall 14' in which the access opening 26 is formed. These
11 correspondingly positioned reinforced portions 44 are also
12 provided to resist the pulling forces exerted on the sidewall
13 segment 14', as the drape 30 is pulled into its open or at least
14 partially open position as represented in Figure 1.

15 The reinforcing assembly further includes a "bumper" type
16 structure which may be in the form of an enlarged peripheral
17 seam 48 secured to the top 16 but more specifically disposed in
18 adjacent or contiguous relation to the junction of the top 16
19 and the sidewall 14. As best shown in Figure 1, the protective
20 peripheral seam 48 extends substantially continuously about the
21 periphery of the top 16 at its junction with the sidewalls 14
22 and 14' and is dimensioned to extend at least partially outward
23 from the exterior surface of both the top 16 and top regions of
24 sidewall 14, 14' so as to protectably engage wall surfaces,
25 doors, or any other object or surface with which the enclosure

1 12, when mounted on the cart 20 in its operative position, may
2 engage during travel and/or storage of the cart 20.

3 With reference to Figures 2 through 4, 6 and 7, each of the
4 reinforced portions, including the peripheral seam 48 as well as
5 the other reinforced portions 40 and 42, are primarily defined
6 by a thickened material portion, comprising at least one
7 additional layer of material being affixed in overlying relation
8 to a layer of material defining the corresponding portion of the
9 enclosure 12. For example, in the sectional views of Figures 6
10 and 7, one of the corner pads 40 is defined by a thickened
11 material portion including a layer of material representing the
12 corner pads 40 it-self, disposed in secured relation over (or
13 under) the layer of material defining the top 16. Similarly in
14 Figure 7, the reinforced portion 42 is preferably disposed in
15 fixed relation over the interior surface 32' of the drape 32
16 immediately adjacent to certain ones of the connector components
17 34'.

18 The cover assembly 10 of the present invention preferably
19 also comprises a storage assembly. The storage assembly
20 includes at least a first compartment, generally indicated as 50
21 in Figure 5, preferably secured to an interior surface 14" of a
22 portion of the sidewall and therefore disposed within the hollow
23 interior of the enclosure 12. The first compartment or pocket
24 50 may include a cover, as at 52, and an outer side or wall
25 portion 54 overlying and surrounding an interior of the pocket

1 or compartment 50 (not shown). This first pocket 50 is disposed
2 within the hollow interior of the enclosure 12 so as to maintain
3 specialized or predetermined garments or items in a completely
4 isolated location, and therefore more thoroughly sterile
5 environment, relative to the remainder of the interior of the
6 enclosure 12 and particularly, in isolated relation to the cart
7 20 and the contents thereof. Further, the storage assembly of
8 the present invention may include at least a second compartment
9 or pocket 56 mounted on the exterior surface of the sidewall 14
10 and including a window as at 58 being either open or formed at
11 least in part from a transparent material which allows viewing
12 of the content maintained on the interior of the second pocket
13 56. Accordingly, documentation including, but not limited to,
14 the intended delivery route or plurality of distribution
15 locations of the contents of the cart for a particular day, etc.
16 may be disposed within the interior of the second pocket 56,
17 such that the informative indicia on the documentation can be
18 read through the window 58. The storage assembly may further
19 include a third pocket or compartment 60, also mounted on the
20 exterior of the sidewall 14 and being of sufficient dimension
21 and configuration to hold used or rejected items on the interior
22 thereof for delivery back to the proper site for cleaning or
23 disposal.

24 Since many modifications, variations and changes in detail
25 can be made to the described preferred embodiment of the

1 invention, it is intended that all matters in the foregoing
2 description and shown in the accompanying drawings be
3 interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense. Thus,
4 the scope of the invention should be determined by the appended
5 claims and their legal equivalents.

6 Now that the invention has been described,